

# FOLGER BOOK CLUB



## Discussion Questions: *The Familiar*

Folger Book Club—December 2024

1. What did you think of this novel? If asked, what would you say this book is about?
2. In its opening, the novel lists a number of small circumstances which it presents as setting the plot in motion. How much of the following action hinges on timing, coincidences, or seemingly insignificant events? What does this imply about the role of fate in what you are about to read? Having finished the book, do you agree with the description of the events as “calamities” and “tragedy”?
3. How is power defined throughout the novel? Who do you think has the most? Does it change, and what are its limits?
4. Santángel warns “There’s a fine line between saint and witch” (pg. 75) and that some miracles are considered reserved for God. Do the contestants abide by these rules? How do you view their powers and, more broadly, the role of magic in this world?
5. Santángel’s deal requires him to give up the thing he values least and Tello to give up what he values most. What are these things for you? Would you pursue such a deal for immortality?
6. The Torneo Secreto is a test of magic but much care and consideration is put into how Luiza looks and presents herself. What does this say about how people receive information? How do you see this tension reflected today?
7. Why do you think Bardugo included the fate of the woman who found Hualit’s emerald in the fish?
8. How does Valentina and Luiza’s relationship change throughout the novel? What inspires these shifts? What was missing in their lives? Was it what they thought was missing?
9. There are many examples of people seeking patronage and favor or looking to associate/bind themselves with others. What are the advantages and disadvantages of such relationships? How successful are these pairings? How balanced?
10. Were you aware of the idea of magical familiars before reading this book? If so, how did this depiction support or challenge your idea of them? If not, having read this novel, what other relationships in fiction would you classify in this way?